Presented to Thad. M. Harris by his hon.d friend The Author.

THOUGHTS

ON THE

LOVE of LIFE and FEAR of DEATH:

DELIVERED

IN A SERMON.

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"*O spare me, that I may recover strength, before I go hence, and be no more.*"

"*The cup which my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it?*"

"*Work out your own salvation with* fear *and* trembling."

"———, *Who hath abolished death, and hath brought life and immortality to light, through the gospel.*"

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BRITISH MUSEUM

2 KINGS, XX. 3.

Hezekiah wept ſore.

HE doubtleſs thought that he had ſufficient reaſon for ſo doing, though it is poſſible, that ſome people, in ſimilar circumſtances, might have had different feelings and diſcovered a different ſpirit. Whether he had juſt occaſion or not, you will be better able to judge, when you have heard the connection. "In thoſe days was king Hezekiah ſick unto death. And the prophet Iſaiah came unto him and ſaid unto him, Thus ſaith the Lord, Set thine houſe in order, for thou ſhalt ſurely die and not live. Then he turned his face to the wall and prayed unto the Lord, ſaying, I beſeech thee, O Lord, remember now, how I have walked before thee in truth and with a perfect heart, and have done that which is good in thy ſight. And Hezekiah wept ſore." Though the declaration of the prophet appears to be abſolute, yet it is probable that Hezekiah viewed it in the light, in which denunciations

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of evil were generally underſtood. He could not but hope that there was a poſſibility, to ſay the leaſt, that the ſentence might be reverſed. We have no reaſon to think, that he ſinned in praying as he did, or that he was leſs reſigned to the will of heaven, than the Saviour was, when he repeatedly requeſted, that the cup might paſs from him. It is true, the Saviour expreſſed his ſubmiſſion, Hezekiah did not; but the ſilence of the king, or rather of the hiſtorian, is no ſufficient proof that he wiſhed to oppoſe the will of his God. If his diſpoſition had not been good, the probability is, that his prayer would not have been heard.

He was happy in his afflicted ſtate, in being able to make his appeal to the great ſearcher of hearts, as to the purity of his intentions and the rectitude of his conduct. If his life had been ill ſpent, he would not have looked up to heaven with that aſſurance that the Lord would hear his prayer. A conſciouſneſs of a well ſpent life will give that confidence in prayer, and in the day of diſtreſs, which nothing elſe can afford. Where this is wanting, promiſes will ſometimes be made of future amendment; but, as theſe proceed rather from neceſſity than choice, it is impoſſible to determine whether they be ſincere. Experience too often proves, that they are like the morning cloud and early dew, which ſoon paſs away. Little dependence can be made upon them.

Of all the principles or paſſions, planted in the human breaſt by the author of our make, there are none more deeply rooted, or have a more ſteady and univerſal influence, than the love of life, and the fear of death. Theſe belong, in a greater or leſs degree, to all living

creatures.

creatures. By the ſteady operation of theſe great laws, the animal and intelligent creation are preſerved. Where reaſoning and calculation are neceſſary, men diſagree; but in certain laws of their make they all unite.

Hezekiah had the common feelings of humanity. He loved life, and the probability is, that he had his fears of death. On theſe two principles I mean to ſpend ſome thoughts, by ſhewing that neither the one, nor the other, when not exceſſive, is inconſiſtent with a well grounded hope of future felicity.

Hezekiah, at the time of making his prayer, was undoubtedly a good man, and well reſigned to the will of God, and yet he earneſtly prays for life; and, as he was greatly comforted when he found that his requeſt was granted, the probability is, that he had his fears of death.

We ſhall begin with the love of life.

This is part of our make, and is ſo interwoven with the human conſtitution, that it never leaves us, while we retain a ſound mind in a ſound body. Of thoſe unhappy people, who conſider life as a burden, and hurry away before their time, I believe, we may ſafely ſay that they are generally, if not always, inſane. No man, while he is a man, that is, while he enjoys the full and free exerciſe of his mental powers, ever did, or can, hate his own fleſh or life to that degree as to put an end to it. By ſo ſaying, I do not mean that ſuicide is never criminal; but the criminality of it lies more in the cauſes, or circumſtances, that lead to it, than in the act itſelf. Some, who finiſh life in this way, are truly to be pitied, others are to be blamed.

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The love of life is a principle of ſo much importance, that it is difficult for us to ſay, how mankind would act, if they were to be entirely diveſted of it. It is this deſire, perhaps, more than any thing or every thing elſe, that leads us to adopt and purſue ſuch meaſures, as have a tendency to preſerve it, both in ourſelves and others. It lays us under ſuch reſtraints as nothing elſe would effect; and leads us, in numberleſs inſtances, without any proſpect of worldly gain, to lend aſſiſtance, and to promote the happineſs of each other. Without it we ſhould be in perpetual danger from our own negligence, or imprudence, and the folly of our fellow men. The affection, as planted within us by the author of nature, we have no reaſon to think is too ſtrong; but like every other paſſion, it may be, and often is, exceſſive. Our buſineſs is, by the help of heaven, to keep it under due reſtraint.

This deſire becomes criminal when it leads us to adopt mean, baſe, or unwarrantable meaſures for its preſervation. Life is not the greateſt bleſſing mankind are capable of enjoying; nor is death the greateſt evil. The former may be bought too dear, and always is, when it cannot be preſerved without ſinning againſt God. It is better to die with honour, than to live in diſgrace. Cowardice is univerſally condemned; fortitude in a good cauſe is always approved. It is our duty to preſerve life, as long as we honeſtly can; but, when we cannot do it without violating the laws of religion and conſcience, it is beſt to give it up. He that loveth life, to ſuch degree as to ſacrifice the peace of his own mind and the favour of his God to preſerve it, ſhall loſe it; while he, who loſes or lays down his life

life in a good cauſe, ſhall find it, or that which ſhall more than compenſate the loſs of it.

Well informed martyrs in a good cauſe have met general approbation. Their memory is bleſſed beyond that of other men. Socrates has been commended by all, who have been acquainted with his principles, cauſe, and manner of death. What praiſe then is due to the Saviour of men, and a cloud of witneſſes, who ſealed their teſtimony to the cauſe of truth, with their blood!

Again, the love of life is too ſtrong, when, by engroſſing our attention, it obliges us to neglect things of greater importance; when the language of our hearts continually is, What ſhall we eat? What ſhall we drink? And wherewithal ſhall we be cloathed? As he is a miſerable wretch who has no God, but mammon; ſo he is little deſerving of commendation, whoſe views are not extended beyond the preſent life. Life in this world, ſhould it run on to the common period, is but ſhort, and muſt ſoon come to an end. It is a vapour that will ſoon vaniſh away—and nothing, when compared with eternity; ſurely then, the preſervation of it ought not to be our principal care, or engage our whole attention. It is not very material, whether we go a little ſooner, or a little later. The longeſt life is not always the beſt. The ſinner an hundred years old ſhall be accurſed. As to ſome, it has been juſtly ſaid, that they would have died better, if they had died ſooner. He has lived too long, who has outlived his reputation. If it is our unhappineſs to live undeſired, let the cauſe be what it may, the probability is, we ſhall

die

die unlamented. The Saviour adviſes his diſciples to take no thought for the morrow; that is, not to be anxious about life or the things of it. The greateſt anxiety will not alter the courſe of events, or make one hair white or black. He is moſt likely to live, and to live agreeably, whoſe mind is well prepared, by unfeigned ſubmiſſion to the will of God, for ſuch events as he has ordained. If our time and thoughts be principally employed about our temporal life, things of greater importance will be unavoidably excluded. Our great buſineſs in this world, undoubtedly, is to prepare to leave it. This preparation cannot be made without great diligence and attention. In temporal things, we often ſee, that the greateſt exertions will not always command ſucceſs. The race is not to the ſwift, nor riches to men of underſtanding; but we are no where told that it is ſo in ſpirituals. "Whatſoever a man ſoweth, that ſhall he alſo reap." "Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life." Spiritual bleſſings, being always good for man, will not be withheld from thoſe who ſincerely ſeek for them. Temporal life, it is true, cannot be preſerved without care; but the danger lies in overdoing. Too much concern is often as hurtful as too little. Anxiety defeats its own purpoſes. Life is ſhortened by a reſtleſs ſpirit; it is prolonged by a quiet mind. This is beſt ſecured by a ſteady courſe of piety and virtue. "There is no peace, ſaith my God, to the wicked." A gnawing worm, bred and nouriſhed in the boſom by criminal practices, will generally ſhorten life. This worm, while it is permitted to live, is as greedy as the grave, and as it feeds not on the body, we have no reaſon

reaſon to think that it will die with it. It certainly may live without it.

Again, this love is too ſtrong when it makes us impatient under the evils of life, or leads us to murmur at the ways of heaven.

It may be impoſſible for a man at all times to poſſeſs his ſoul in perfect patience. Stoical apathy is a thing not to be deſired, if it could be obtained. If the Saviour had one amiable quality, by which he was diſtinguiſhed more than another, ſenſibility was this one. On all occaſions, he diſcovered the moſt tender feelings and the greateſt concern for the happineſs of mankind. He felt much for himſelf, and was full of compaſſion towards others. Under all his ſufferings, (and he could truly ſay, never was there any ſorrow like my ſorrow) he never indulged an impatient thought, or uttered a murmuring word. He complained, it is true, and ſo may we; but after making his prayer, he reſigned himſelf up entirely to the will of his Father. He had, to appearance, the ſame innocent fondneſs for life that we have; but, if he could do more good by dying than by living, he was willing to depart. The ignominious and painful circumſtances that attended his death afflicted him much; but, ſince the purpoſes of providence could not be ſo well anſwered in any other way, he cheerfully ſubmitted to the pains and reproach of the croſs. Good men have not always diſcovered the ſame degree of ſubmiſſion. The moſt patient man was overwhelmed, and for a ſeaſon manifeſted a degree of impatience; but it was not long before he recovered the poſſeſſion of himſelf. The gen-

eral tenour of his conduct was highly commendable, and his example, under unparallelled ſufferings, has been of great ſervice to mankind. The weeping prophet was ſo borne down with a torrent of affliction, that he ſpake unadviſedly with his lips. We forgive him; for when he had recovered his ſpirits, he diſcovered a different temper. And if at any time, we ſhould be overcome in the ſame way, we have every reaſon to hope, that our God will conſider, that we are but *duſt*, and that he will not be ſtrict to mark againſt us ſuch things as, in our ſober moments, we utterly diſapprove, and which proceed from weakneſs in our make, and not from wickedneſs in our hearts.

Many things conſpire to increaſe our fondneſs for life, and our loathneſs to part with it. Travellers on a journey, if they find a place exceedingly pleaſant and the company agreeable, reluctantly leave it. They dread the hour when they muſt depart; and had we no bitter drops in our cup, ſurrounded with numberleſs favours, as we are, our love of life would be much too ſtrong, nor ſhould we be ever willing, or prepared, to leave it.

We are apt to complain of the uncertainty of earthly enjoyments, but our complaints are certainly without juſt foundation. Secure the goods of life to man, and the world would be ſeven fold more wretched. The rich would have no feeling for the poor, and the unqualified envy of the poor towards the rich would effectually prevent all enjoyment. It is the uncertainty of earthly goods, that makes us feel for each other in the day of diſtreſs, and lays a foundation for mutual

acts

acts of kindneſs and compaſſion. Take away this uncertainty, and the ſpirit of the rich fool, ſo called, would be the general temper of mankind. Not that poverty and the great uncertainty of earthly goods will entirely take away, or was ever deſigned to take away, the deſire of life. The miſerable wiſh to live, and the general prayer of mankind is, when life is brought into danger, "O ſpare me, that I may recover ſtrength, before I go hence, and be no more!"

But ſome may ſay, if we act rationally, why do we wiſh to live at all: Since the evils of life are more than a balance for its goods?

It is poſſible ſome may think ſo; but this I humbly conceive is rather the language of diſappointment, or a diſtempered brain, than of ſober ſenſe. Though the evils of life are numerous and unavoidable; yet to an attentive mind it is very plain, that all the laws, by which this world is governed, are calculated in the beſt manner for the production of the greateſt poſſible good. And ſuppoſing it were in our power to alter them, we have every reaſon to think that the conſequences would be unhappy; the world would be more miſerable than it is. Our wants and pains are undoubtedly neceſſary to our enjoyments; and if we had leſs evil to endure, the preſumption is, we ſhould have leſs good to enjoy.

In making up our minds on this ſubject, we are in great danger of error, in conſequence of a certain law of our make, though this law is univerſally acknowledged to be wiſe and good. We are ſo formed, that

painful

painful ſenſations of every kind, make a deeper impreſſion, are more eaſily recollected, and longer remembered, than the contrary. Many agreeable ſenſations periſh with the moment; whereas, the pains of an hour will be remembered as long as we live. A child need not be burnt but once, to make it ever after dread the fire. If we were as forgetful of pains, as we are of pleaſures, we ſhould be much oftener in trouble, than we commonly are. The recollection of paſt errors is the way to avoid them in time to come. The ſchool of affliction is the ſchool of wiſdom, and it is by ſuffering, more than any thing elſe, that we learn to be wiſe. It was by ſuffering that Joſeph's brethren were led to reflect on their cruel treatment of their brother. It was ſuffering that ſtopped the prodigal ſon in his career, brought him to his ſenſes, and led him to reſolve as he did. David ſpake the language of millions, when he ſaid, "Before I was afflicted, I went aſtray; but now have I kept thy word." "It is good for me that I have been afflicted."

We have no reaſon to think, that the evils of life are too many, or too great. It is doubtleſs the Creator's wiſh, that mankind ſhould enjoy as much proſperity as they can bear. To ſay, that every man has his exact proportion of good and evil, is ſaying more than we know; but to an unclouded mind, I think, it muſt appear, that an equality, ſo far as it could be obtained by general laws, was what the Sovereign of the univerſe had in view. Interpoſitions might make them more equal; but this remedy would be worſe than the diſeaſe. Our underſtanding or mental powers, upon the ſuppoſition that they were frequent, would do us no

good

good. After all our complaints of the unequal diſtributions of providence, it is very rare that a man can be found, who, all things conſidered, would exchange circumſtances with his neighbour.

I ſhall now paſs from the love of life to make ſome obſervations on the fear of death. This was one thing, that occaſioned the ſadneſs of the king.

This fear belongs in ſome degree to all living creatures, and is part of the human make. It appears as ſoon as we come to years of underſtanding, or are capable of anticipation. Before, it is not needed. It would do the infant no good. It is a principle of ſo much importance, that, I ſuppoſe, the human kind could not ſubſiſt *well*, if at all, without it. It is the great thing, which, perhaps, more than any one thing that can be named, keeps the world in order, and prevents, in a degree at leaſt, the moſt atrocious crimes. The ſtrength of this fear is undoubtedly proportioned to our preſent condition. If it were ſtronger, it might bring on gloomineſs and diſtraction; if it were leſs, it would loſe nearly all its force. As it is, it curbs the appetites and paſſions of men, reſtrains, if it does not entirely ſubdue, their luſts. Take off this reſtraint, it is impoſſible to ſay how mankind would act.

It is ſomewhat ſurprizing that the frequency of this event, doth not make it ſo familiar, as to take away all fear. This may be the caſe in the field of battle, where thouſands are periſhing in a moment; but it is not the caſe with ſuch as are confined to a gloomy chamber, a curtained bed, ſurrounded with weeping friends and mourning relatives. Under

Under this head, it may not be amiſs to mention ſome things that tend to increaſe this fear, and others that tend to diminiſh it.

This fear is commonly increaſed in ſome proportion to the nearneſs of the event. While we can put death at a diſtance, and look on ourſelves ſafe, though we know it muſt certainly overtake us, it gives little more concern, apparently, than if it would never come. But, when the king of terrors turns his face towards us, we ſee him approaching with haſty ſteps, and all hope of eſcaping is gone, or nearly gone, we then begin to tremble. This was the caſe with the weeping king. He could not diſpute the truth of what the prophet ſaid. His own feelings might confirm the declaration, and all hope was nearly gone. Our fears are commonly in proportion to the greatneſs of the danger, let it come from what quarter it may.

It is not pretended that all have the ſame occaſion for fear: For death to different characters will undoubtedly be followed with different conſequences. All do not go to the ſame place. One thing that commonly makes this event exceedingly diſtreſſing, when it draws near, is an accuſing and condemning conſcience, which anticipates puniſhment of ſome kind or other, and generally in proportion to the number or atrocity of crimes. Sin is the ſting of death. For certain deeds the heart ſeldom, if ever, fails to condemn the offender. In Cain we ſee the power of conſcience and the picture of miſery. His guilty mind led him to imagine, that every one that met him would kill him. The man that is unfit to live is always afraid to

die.

die. Other ſins, beſide murder, commonly excite fears, in proportion to their magnitude, in the hour of death. If in the day of proſperity ſinners can live without reflection; yet in the day of danger or in the hour of diſtreſs it is impoſſible to prevent it. When the ſinner is ſhut out from the world, or ſeparated from his companions in guilt, he finds himſelf neceſſitated to look into himſelf. The memory is frequently buſy, after ſome of the other faculties begin to fail. Guilt, unleſs there is a hope of pardon, is always diſtreſſing, more ſo than any one thing that can be named. "The ſpirit of a man will bear his infirmities; but a wounded ſpirit who can bear?"

Such as have any faith in futurity have their fears greatly increaſed, by what they apprehend may come after death. There is a wo pronounced againſt the wicked, which, they have no reaſon to think, is fully executed in the preſent world. What may be included in this wo, they cannot certainly ſay; but if revelation is true, it is ſomething awful beyond deſcription. If they have no faith, yet, as it is impoſſible to prove a negative, or the impoſſibility of an exiſtence in a future ſtate, the mind can never be at reſt.

Beſides, the arguments againſt a future exiſtence do not always appear in the ſame light to the ſame perſon, in different circumſtances. Voltaire, that champion of infidelity, who by his wit and ſatire, more than by reaſon and argument, has made more deiſts perhaps than all the deiſtical writers of the age, died, or affected to die, a believer. This comes from one who could be under no temptation to propagate ſuch a report, if it had

had not been true—from a French philoſopher,* Condorcet, who wrote his eulogium. I do not ſay that this has been the caſe with others; but this I ſay, that infidelity is a gloomy doctrine, and will never enable a man to meet death with that fortitude which many of the martyrs diſcovered, nor afford that calmneſs and ſerenity which are often ſeen in the dying chriſtian.

We ſhall now hint at ſome things that directly tend to diminiſh this fear, though they do not entirely remove it.

I know it is ſaid, that perfect love caſteth out fear, and that there is no fear in love. But ſtill, in the ſame proportion that our love is imperfect, our fears will remain. Who dares ſay that he is abſolutely perfect in love? He may as well ſay that he has no ſin.

Man at preſent, I humbly conceive, is too weak to be wholly diveſted of fear. His work is not completed, and he muſt continue to work out his ſalvation with *fear* and *trembling*, as long as he lives. Saints are nothing more than penitent ſinners. There is always room for improvement, and always danger of failing of the grace of God. What led the apoſtle, Paul, to uſe the greateſt diligence and circumſpection in the whole of his behaviour, was a degree of fear, leſt, after he had preached to others, he himſelf ſhould be a caſtaway. His words are theſe; "I keep under my body and bring it into ſubjection; leſt that by any means when I have preached to others, I myſelf ſhould be a caſtaway." If ſuch a man had his fears, who can expect to live and die without?

We all know how men feel, when they have carried

* See Prieſtley's anſwer to Paine.

a difficult point or gained complete victory. They frequently relax in ſuch a manner, as to hazard all they have gained. The chriſtian, while on his journey, has no time for relaxation. He muſt continue preſſing on towards the mark. He muſt enter the grave before he can reſt from his labours. His fears are undoubtedly neceſſary, and will be, as long as he lives, to excite him to diligence and perſeverance in running the chriſtian race, ſo as to gain the prize. He cannot wiſh to have them entirely taken away.

Let it be granted, that the apoſtles and ſome of the firſt chriſtians, at particular times, had ſuch an aſſurance as caſt out all fear, yet we may not thence conclude, that the ſame degree of aſſurance is neceſſary for all. The wiſdom and goodneſs of God appear in proportioning means to ends, his grace to the ſituation and circumſtances of his children. A high degree of aſſurance was beneficial if not neceſſary for ſuch as lived in jeopardy every hour, and in continual danger of meeting death in the moſt dreadful form. As their trials were extraordinary, ſo was their aſſiſtance. They undoubtedly had ſtronger hopes and fewer fears than ordinary chriſtians. Surrounded with danger on every ſide, it was impoſſible for them to ſleep, or for a moment to be off their guard. They could not need fears with regard to futurity to make them watchful. Our ſtate is different, and *we* need our fears to prevent indolence and inactivity. But though all fears and doubts are not to be removed, yet ſuch as are truly diſtreſſing generally may. Generally I ſay, for I cannot but think, that there are ſome, who die on the borders of deſpair, who, to their abundant joy, will find, that

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their fears were founded on falſe principles, and when the hay and ſtubble are conſumed, ſhall appear in the bliſsful preſence of their God. A certain gloomineſs ariſing from falſe principles may exceedingly diſtreſs the mind; but where the heart is ſincere they will not deſtroy the ſoul.

In the religion of nature, ſo called, we do not find much that tends to remove the fears of dying men. I am not inſenſible that ſtupidity will in a great degree prevent them. There is truth in that ſaying, they that know the leaſt fear the leaſt, and many perſons may be bold merely becauſe they are blind. But how an enlightened or well informed mind can be at reſt, upon the principles of nature, is not eaſy to ſay, that God will pardon offenders (it being an act of grace) could not have been known without a revelation. Where nature was deficient, revelation comes to our aid. Hence we learn, we certainly learn, that the penitent ſhall be pardoned; hence we learn, that the truly righteous ſhall be forever happy in the favour of their God; hence we learn more fully the character of the Deity, and the way to eternal life through Jeſus Chriſt; that through him God is reconciling the world unto himſelf, not imputing unto penitent and believing ſinners their treſpaſſes; hence, in ſhort, we learn, that God ſo loved the world, that he gave his only begotten ſon, that whoſoever believeth in him might not periſh, but have everlaſting life. Now, if theſe things are true and we have a well grounded hope, having complied with the requiſitions of the goſpel, we may diſmiſs our fears in part at leaſt. But, as many are apt to deceive themſelves in this matter,

and

and cry peace, peace, when no ſolid and laſting peace belongs to them, if ſome fears ſhould remain, leſt this ſhould be *our* unhappy caſe, they may do us no hurt. They may put us upon examining ourſelves from day to day, upon comparing our tempers and lives with the rules of our holy religion; they may excite to diligence in making our calling and election ſure; and by patient continuance in the ways of well doing, to make further and greater improvements in true piety and chriſtian virtue. In this way, the probability is, that our fears, be they what they may, will gradually abate. If they ſhould not, ſtill they may do us no hurt. "They that ſow in tears ſhall reap in joy."

Of the truth of that revelation which abates our fears and increaſes our hopes, we have as much evidence, as can be reaſonably deſired; and if we had more, it is by no means certain, it would do us any good. Let it be ſuch as ſhall put an end to all controverſy and remove all doubts, there would be an end of inquiry, and of the exerciſe of diligence, integrity, patience and perſeverance in our reſearches after religious truth. Let the evidence be as clear as the ſun at noon day, there certainly could be no virtue in faith. Let all ſee and judge exactly alike, there could be no room for candour and forbearance in matters of opinion. As the mental powers are all ſtrengthened and improved by exerciſe: ſo it is doubtleſs the deſign of the author of nature that our circumſtances ſhould be ſuch as to make exertions neceſſary. The want of theſe would bring on ignorance and ſtupidity. It may be no diſadvantage, upon the whole, that as to many things we diſagree; that with reſpect to futurity we ſee through a glaſs darkly;

darkly; and carry our fears with us to the grave. Greater light might unfit us for the various employments of life. We have much to do here, and while we are about our Father's buſineſs, or are uſefully employed, we are preparing, in the beſt manner that mortals can, for a happy immortality. Greater knowledge might make us impatient and more uncomfortable upon our journey, than we are at preſent. It is not expected that men ſhould live like angels. Let every duty be attended to in its ſeaſon and with proper ſpirit, the end will be happy.

Let us learn to be contented with that portion of good, that our great Parent is pleaſed to beſtow upon us, and with that meaſure of life; he ſeeth it beſt to grant; remembring that he doth not willingly afflict and grieve the children of men; that it is no pleaſure to him to ſee us in diſtreſs; and that great ſufferings are, or will be, productive of proportional good. "Theſe light afflictions, that are but for a moment, work for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory."

Let us be careful that we do not build on a ſandy foundation; if we do, the fabric will fall and cruſh us beneath its ruins. With all our advantages, and no people perhaps ever enjoyed greater, there is danger of doing this, and ſo great, that we need be always on our guard. Truth does not float on the ſurface. He that would obtain it, muſt ſpare neither coſt nor pains. To live without error is not the portion of man; but if we are humble, diligent, candid, patient and perſevering in our inquiries, and ſincere in the practice of what

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we apprehend to be right, we may cheerfully hope that our God will preſerve us from ſtrong deluſions and fatal miſtakes. While we are careful, as far as poſſible, to avoid the corruptions of chriſtianity, both in faith and practice, let us be careful to hold faſt the form of ſound words which we have received in faith and love, and not ſuffer ourſelves to be driven about with every wind of doctrine. In this way, if our fears do not wholly leave us, as it is probable they will not, yet our hopes will increaſe till they are ſwallowed up in the enjoyment of perfect felicity.

Some of us, perhaps, have been in circumſtances nearly ſimilar to thoſe of king Hezekiah. If no meſſage have been ſent from heaven, yet our own feelings and the fears of our friends have nearly ſupplied its place. We prayed for life. Our prayer was heard, life has been protracted, perhaps, twice fifteen years. Our inquiry now is, or ought to be, how has this time been ſpent? Perhaps we have made vows. Have we obſerved them? Or have they been like thoſe of mariners, when the danger is paſt? If we have ſoon forgotten the day of our calamity, our ingratitude will greatly enhance our guilt, our fears will return with redoubled force, and we certainly ſhall not be able to look up to heaven with that confidence that good Hezekiah did. Forgetfulneſs of peculiar favours granted in the moment of diſtreſs, is a ſtrong argument of an impious or vicious mind. The king, in all probability, ſpent the ſpace granted him well, and ſo had no reaſon to mourn that his life had been protracted.

Let us learn not to deſpiſe or cenſure our brethren concerning

concerning whom we have every reaſon to hope well, becauſe they have their fears, which for aught we know, may be innocent and uſeful. They may ariſe from the ſame quarter the Saviour's did, from a high degree of ſenſibility. It is cruel to wound the feelings of ſuch, by bitter ſpeeches, harſh and ſevere cenſures. Bitterneſs toward ſuch whoſe feelings and opinions are in ſome reſpects different from our own, like anger, reſteth only in the boſoms of perſons of a certain deſcription. Happy would it be for the chriſtian world, if that ſpirit were more prevalent, which the great Dr. Franklin ſaid, he found increaſing within him, as he increaſed in years and underſtanding. "The longer I live, ſaith he, the greater my fears leſt I ſhould be in the wrong, and the more ready am I to hear what others have to ſay." Nor is this an uncommon caſe. Diffidence and candour commonly increaſe with knowledge. People, who haſtily make up their minds, by attending only to one ſide of a queſtion, and determine not to look any further, leſt their faith ſhould waver, are apt to be ſevere with regard to ſuch as differ from them; but the man who is diligent and impartial in his inquiries after truth, and wiſhes for nothing more, than that he may be able to correct his errors, if any he have, will never think of bringing all mankind to one ſtandard, or of reprobating ſuch as may honeſtly differ from him. They are not always the beſt chriſtians, who pretend that they have arrived to ſuch aſſurance as caſteth out all fear. We pay but little regard to what men ſay in commendation of themſelves. We all deſpiſe the phariſee, who went up into the temple to pray, but, inſtead of praying, ſpent his time in boaſting

boaſting of his extraordinary piety and uncommon ſanctity. We commend the publican for his great humility. The former was without fear; the latter was accepted. A tree we always think is beſt known by its fruit, a chriſtian by his temper and life.

A well grounded hope is of infinite importance. It is a pearl of great price, and can never be purchaſed too dear. This may be, in general, obtained in the way which the goſpel preſcribes, by a ſound faith and a good life, or by a patient continuance in the ways of well doing. This is the method the apoſtle Paul adopted for himſelf, and by his example recommended to others. In this way he enjoyed great ſatisfaction at the cloſe of life, ſuch ſolid peace and quietneſs as is not to be obtained in any other. "I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finiſhed my courſe, I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteouſneſs, which the Lord, the righteous judge, ſhall give me at that day: And not to me only, but to all them alſo that love his appearing." In the ſame way our fears may be greatly diminiſhed and our hopes increaſed. That we may have wiſdom to purſue this way, God of his infinite mercy grant through Jeſus Chriſt our Lord.

FINIS.

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